



LOWCOUNTRY STYLE, GLOBAL APPEAL

*Vintage Design brings European and Middle Eastern
flavor to Lowcountry architecture*

by ROBIN HOWARD

photography by PATRICK BRICKMAN



I'VE JUST ASKED SHERRI Nester of Vintage Design, LLC about her professional beginnings in the Lowcountry. I did not expect her answer to include phrases such as “Queen of Jordan” and “... then the revolution hit.” She has my attention. But let’s not get ahead.

Nester and her husband, Calvin Russell (Russ) Nester, are the founders of Vintage Design, a design-build company that takes on new construction, custom homes and major renovation projects. Sherri Nester is a graduate of the Technical School of Architecture in Mainz, Germany. In her early work, she was part of a team designing libraries for young adults in Iran, one of the queen’s pet projects. One such library was a gift from the Queen of Iran to the Queen of Jordan. The extensive experience she gained during the two years after graduation working in Iran became integral to her designs. Then, the Islamic Revolution



came, and Nester, along with her family, found refuge in the United States in 1978.

Even though she spoke only German and Farsi, Nester landed a job with an interior architecture firm in Alexandria, Virginia. “I learned to speak English at that company,” she says. “Within a year, I was a project manager. After a couple of years, I went to work for the last of the legendary living architects, Pietro Belluschi.” Belluschi was an Italian-American architect who was

a leader in the American Modern architecture movement. His buildings reflected international style and embraced new materials.

In the early 1980s, Nester worked with a firm that had projects in Miami, Washington, D.C., and Charleston. The Holy City was in the first days of its renaissance, and some locals were skeptical about the Charleston project, calling it “Riley’s Folly.” That project is now known as Belmont Charleston Place, the graceful and timeless epicenter of

downtown tourism. Nester was part of the team that designed the interiors, including the iconic Georgian open-arm staircase, custom Belgian carpets, and the 2.5-ton, 3,000-piece Venetian chandelier. “We were so in love with Charleston,” Nester says. “When the economy went south in the late 1980s, right after Hurricane Hugo, my husband got up and said, ‘We are going to Charleston.’ We sold the house, packed the family and moved.”



Once ensconced in Charleston, she worked for local award-winning architects Thomas and Denzinger. "I learned romanticism in design from Mr. Thomas and benefitted from the amazing technical know-how of Mr. Denzinger," she says. And within a couple of years Nester went on her own and started a new company.

Today, Nester is a licensed contractor in South Carolina. She and her developer husband design high-end custom homes and take on extensive remodeling and commercial projects. They are finishing up a beautiful renovation on Gordon Street in Hampton Park, and they recently finished

extensive renovations to the House at Eden in Gracefield Plantation, Walterboro, South Carolina.

Their most recent exciting project is an outfield cottage on the same plantation. The renovation for their long-term client includes a new massive barn that will feature custom trusses and contemporary design, along with large barn doors that slide open to reveal huge firepits outside. "It's a challenge, and that's what's lovely about it," she says.

Nester's designs have a subtle geometry and old-world grace that hint at her heritage and international background.



"People who like my work, like my work," she says. "Several times I have had people contact me to design a new home, and I find that they are living in a house I designed years ago. I think the reason for that is that I don't depend on books to tell me how a design ought to be. I lived it. I come from the other side of the world, and the combination of Middle Eastern and European with Southern charm is truly the essence of my designs." *

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